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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000665

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ANPP AND BUHARI FIGHT THE PARTY'S
DISARRAY

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons: 1.5 (B & D).

1. (C) The ANPP, Nigeria's second largest party in the 1999 elections, has survived its subordinate status for the past four years and remains the strongest opposition party. With its power base in the North, the ANPP also has produced the staunchest presidential challenger to President Obasanjo, former Head of State General Muhammadu Buhari. It remains now for the party to capitalize on fissures within the PDP and on public disenchantment with the Obasanjo Administration to expand its support base to challenge the PDP in its strongholds, particularly in the South-South and the Southeast. While Buhari faces an uphill battle against Obasanjo, the ANPP and other opposition parties may snatch a few gubernatorial and numerous National Assembly seats from the PDP.

2. (C) To exploit the PDP divisions, the ANPP must first heal its own wounds. The party suffers discord along two major lines. While ANPP governors are all Northerners, the ANPP enjoys support in the southeast and the south-south regions. In some states in these two zones, the party is believed to have done better in 1999 than the actual vote count would suggest; but the net result of vote rigging by both parties favored the PDP more than the ANPP. However, the heavy-handed antics of northern governors at the helm of the party have alienated some grassroots support both in the south and to a lesser degree in the north. The second rift is between Buhari and the new party chairman Don Etiebet. Buhari is a no-nonsense former military dictator from the north who can be a martinet. He gives no quarter and expects none. Etiebet is a seasoned southern politician who has prospered on a diet of "scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" politics. The two men come from different worlds and it was difficult to get them into complementary orbit. However, opposition to Obasanjo and the realization that their destinies are linked has smoothed some of the rough spots and brought them closer together.

Northern Races

3. (C) Some Northern gubernatorial races are shaping up to be serious challenges to the ruling PDP. In Katsina, Kaduna and Plateau, and to a lesser extent Bauchi, the ANPP has a chance to pick up the top statewide office. In other areas, however, the party faces embarrassment. In Jigawa, an ANPP stronghold, a divisive primary has not been resolved. The unpopular incumbent has been forced on the state party. In Zamfara, the governor is facing growing disillusionment with his candidacy, as much a factor of dissatisfaction with Shari'a implementation as an indictment of the Governor's languid performance. Kwara has been a hot race, with the ANPP incumbent locked in a contest of wills with the son of the state kingpin who jumped to the ruling PDP. In Adamawa, the home state of incumbent Vice President Atiku Abubakar, the incumbent PDP governor is unpopular, devoid of charisma and facing a stiff challenge from a well know politician who is in the ANPP. In Plateau, a PDP Governor, who is intensely disliked, faces an uphill battle with strong candidates from both the ANPP and the AD.

4. (C) However, putting a brake on ANPP potential gains, the party's organizational structure is cataleptic in some areas and members fail to cooperate. While the ANPP has its eye on Kano state, a dispute over its candidate reduced its appeal to the voters. The gubernatorial candidate who emerged is said to have few resources and little political backing; the rancorous primary has left the ANPP sorely factionalized. Without a strong pull from Buhari's coat-tails, that candidate is seen as having little chance of success.

Presidential Rift

15. (C) At the Presidential level, the relationship among the ANPP candidate, Buhari, and his group of inexperienced campaign staffers, mostly Northerners, with the party's new National Chairman Don Etiebet, a native of Akwa Ibom state, got off to a rocky start. This rift, combined with Buhari's late launching of his campaign, coming after the murder of key supporter Marshall Harry, meant that the ANPP had many obstacles to overcome. Buhari was nominated in a divisive convention exercise, but made some efforts (not wholly successful) to mollify his critics, even though he made little effort to reconcile with the losers. He enjoys tremendous grassroots appeal in northern Nigeria, and some positive sentiment in the south, a product of disenchantment with Obasanjo's unproductive government that has fueled a certain nostalgia for Buhari's firm governance in the eighties. Buhari's selection of former Vice-President Chuba Okadigbo, an Igbo, as his running mate has helped draw some support from that critical region of the country by giving the third largest ethnic group a second shot at holding the Vice-presidency (Alex Ekwueme was Vice President in the Second Republic).

16. (C) Buhari's campaign has not featured prominently in the government-controlled press, although he is gaining more media attention. Most private media outlets are Lagos-based, a city that is much more friendly to Obasanjo than Buhari. The President's team has been very effective at paying the press to ignore Buhari's campaign and Buhari's team has been unable to convince the press to provide coverage, largely due to the inexperience and lack of deep pockets of his press staff.

17. (C) Yet, according to many, Buhari's public appearances in some areas produce crowds exceeding even the expectations of his optimistic campaign staff. In Adamawa state, many say that the turn-out dwarfed the crowd that came to see the incumbent Vice-President, a native of the state. Throughout the north, the turnout for Buhari has been enormous and spontaneous. Similar crowds have followed him throughout his northern campaign, including Taraba, Plateau, Kano and Bauchi. One Obasanjo campaigner, traveling with the Vice-President lamented to Poloff that Buhari attracts huge crowds, while the Obasanjo-Atiku campaign is compelled to offer inducements to local officials to round up crowds for the President or Vice-President. Another Obasanjo campaign staffer told Poloff that the crowds President Obasanjo drew in Port Harcourt, Yola and Maiduguri were "no comparison" to the Buhari appeal in the same locations. He has even made some headway in dispelling the accusation that he is a religious bigot. A group of bishops in the southeast recently proclaimed that Buhari is an honest candidate and worthy of support. This week, Obasanjo's 1999 opponent Olu Falae and the family of MKO Abiola reportedly endorsed Buhari's candidacy. Because of his image, Buhari is a compelling figure whom people will come out to see -- the challenge is whether that will translate into votes outside of the northern region.

18. (C) Buhari's campaign also suffers from a lack of funds, especially in comparison to the presumed open government coffers available to the PDP. He is receiving support from the north and the south-south, but the northern elite have been chary with their contributions. Buhari is not popular with two of the most important northern Emirs or with many of the richest northern businessmen who worry that his strict attention to discipline could dry up the government trough and cripple their businesses. Other traditional rulers, including the Shehu of Borno and most of the other Emirs in state capitals, are backing Buhari, but they lack the deep pockets necessary to bankroll the campaign.

19. (C) With the deepest pockets in the north, the intentions of former Head of State Ibrahim Babangida demand much attention. His almost mythical reputation was damaged, however, during the PDP and ANPP primaries. Playing several levels of intrigue, he is widely viewed as having failed to secure his preferred outcomes, and possible opponents do not fear him as much as before. According to one source, when he attempted to intervene in a Senatorial race in his home state of Niger, he was told (by a former lieutenant) that he should desist. "Pick your governor, and leave the rest to us," the lieutenant reportedly advised his mentor. Also, it appears that the Abacha family, long believed to be funding Buhari, apparently pulled back on their support. They have focussed on channeling the bulk of their contributions to particular gubernatorial and Assembly candidates in the North rather than supporting Buhari. Figuring that Obasanjo will be reelected, they probably do not want to unduly antagonize him. Also, given Buhari's track record, they cannot be

sure that he would not go after their ill-gotten gains if elected.

10. (C) COMMENT: While it is difficult to assess overall sentiment, the ANPP appears to have support throughout the country, with the exception of the Yoruba southwest. Given the widespread disaffection with the Obasanjo government and the harmful internecine rivalries in the PDP, the ANPP might pick up some National Assembly and gubernatorial seats at PDP expense. Buhari seems to be gaining traction in some places while Obasanjo, grappling with the fuel shortages and the crisis in the Delta, is not going into the elections at the full stride he had hoped. Still, Obasanjo has the advantages of incumbency and no one can really tell if Buhari has successfully shaken the tag of being a regional and a religious candidate.
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